DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 442 865 TM 031 285

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TITLE Assessment and Career in a Primary School.
PUB DATE 2000-04-00
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; Interaction; Models; Program Evaluation; *Social Influences; *Student Evaluation; *Teacher Role; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS England

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which social processes and taken-for-granted classroom practices influence the production of individual pupil performance, its assessment, and the interpretations of such judgments. The study is contextualized in the longitudinal parallel ethnographies of the Identity and Learning Programme, a collaborative program that originated in two urban elementary schools in England that is influenced by theories of symbolic interactionism. The findings presented here relate to the assessment phase of the overall program and focus around a model of questions concerning social influences on assessment. Key aspects of the model are presented and illustrated with examples from the case study that informed it. The overall model and the analysis give rise to the question of what is involved in a teacher "knowing" a child for assessment purposes. The case study of one pupil over the years of elementary school education illustrates the exploration of this question. (Contains 26 references.) (SLD)

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ASSESSMENT AND CAREER IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Presented by *Ann Filer* at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting at New Orleans, April 2000

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TM031285

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1. ABSTRACT

This paper concerns ways in which social processes and taken for granted classroom practices influence the production of individual pupil performance, its assessment and the interpretations of such judgements. The study is contextualised within the longitudinal parallel ethnographies of the *Identity and Learning Programme* from which it is drawn and which has been influenced by theories of symbolic interactionism. The findings presented here relate to the 'assessment' phase of the overall programme and focus around a model of 'questions concerning social influences on assessment'. Key aspects of this model are presented and illustrated with examples of the case study data which informed it. The overall model and analysis gives rise to a further question, which is also posed here, namely: 'What is involved in a teacher 'knowing' a child for assessment purposes?'

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

2.1 *The Identity and Learning Programme*

The study reported here draws on a wider exploration of *The Social World of Pupil Assessment* (Filer and Pollard 2000) In that forthcoming publication we suggest that:

- individual performances cannot be separated from the contexts and social relations within which they are embedded;
- assessment techniques are social processes and are viable to bias and distortion;
- the 'results' of assessment take their meaning for individuals via cultural processes of interpretation and following mediation by others.

Our arguments thus highlight various ways in which social processes inevitably intervene in assessment procedures. Our purpose is to contribute to a discourse concerning assessment as a social practice and product (Filer 2000), rather than to that concerning the pursuit of technical 'fixes'. As our title suggests, our aim is to develop sociological understandings of classroom processes and interaction and hence, of the social influences on assessment.

The research we report is part of the *Identity and Learning Programme*. That collaborative programme originated in two parallel ethnographies of children's learning and school experience in contrasting primary schools. The 'assessment' phase of the *ILP* represents an extension of Filer's (1993c) PhD study in a primary school with a predominantly working class intake. That study has run in parallel with, and generates comparisons with, one initiated by Pollard in 1987 featuring pupils from predominantly middle class suburb of the same city. Children in the two schools, Albert Park primary and Greenside Primary, were studied throughout their primary school education and we continue to track the pupils' careers through their secondary schools to age 16.

In relation to this 'assessment' phase of the *ILP,* we monitored ways in which, year on year, pupils shaped their school identities and careers in the context of judgements made, not only by teachers but also by families, friends and peers who variously, acted upon, contested or ignored, the official and unofficial voices of school assessment. The aim has been to generate holistic understandings grounded in the socio-cultural contexts of home, community and playground, as well as classrooms.

2.2 *Symbolic interactionism*

Symbolic interactionist theory supports a focus on *meanings for participants* in the interpretations they make and in the shaping of identity. The meanings and perspectives of pupils, teachers, families and peers, gathered over eight years, also enabled the generation of patterns of experience which shaped our typologies and models of pupil learning (Pollard with Filer 1996) and career strategies (Pollard and Filer 1999). It also enabled comparisons to be made between the impact and meanings of school assessment for individual pupils and families across different socio-economic settings (Filer and Pollard 2000).

Symbolic interactionism originated in the theories of Mead (1934) through which he developed the idea of one's self concept being acquired through social interaction. The form of symbolic interactionism that we have developed has much in common with other UK 'interactionist ethnographers' (see Hammersley 1999). In everyday terms, we might cite Jenkins' (1996) interpretation of Mead, in which he suggests:

> We cannot see ourselves at all without also seeing ourselves as other people see us. (Jenkins 1996:21)

This interpretation of Jenkins represents very important elements of symbolic interactionism. It emphasises the development of meaning through significant relationships and events and the development of important aspects of the individual sense of 'self' as a social product. Indeed, 'Identity' presents a core analytic theme through the *Identity and Learning Programme*, connecting and integrating the major themes of 'learning', 'pupil career' and 'assessment'. In this the role of parents, friends, teachers or imagined others from the media is important, as young children develop their sense of who they are as learners and pupils. Also of key importance in this is the role of formal and informal assessment events, through which capacities are deemed to be measured, behaviours and attitudes evaluated and both labelled and classified in relatively categoric, authoritative and public ways.

2.3 *Research design, data gathering and analysis*

As indicated in the Introduction, our overall research design for this phase of the *Identity and Learning Programme* was based on two longitudinal ethnographies of primary schools.

A variety of qualitative methods were used including classroom observations, pupil and teacher interviews, teacher records, reports and other documentation regarding pupils' achievement, strategies and relationships. Parental interviews and diary entries told us about ways in which school assessments are interpreted and mediated within family settings. Peer group interviews and the observed culture of the playground provided information on an alternative source of evaluation and focus for pupil identity. Other data sources included samples of pupils' work, photographs, video recordings and sociometry. Such data-gathering was informed by a carefully constructed annual schedule, as well as by key issues that emerged during the progress of the study

At Greenside School, Andrew Pollard began data collection in 1987 with a Reception class cohort, with particular focus on ten key children. The school's intake was predominantly drawn from children of affluent, white middle-class professional or self-employed families. At Albert Park School, Ann Filer began her PhD work in 1989, tracking the assessment experiences of a predominantly working class cohort who were the first to experience the National Curriculum and associated assessment arrangements introduced in England that year. From 1993-5, ESRC funding enabled us to extend the Albert Park data set and develop direct analytic comparisons with that of Greenside.

Annual data-sets relating to each child, and to each successive classroom context were compiled and we read and re-read them both longitudinally and comparatively, trying to appreciate the lives of the pupils as a whole. As a second element of our analysis we worked on ways of representing our analysis more abstractly. Our explicit intention in this *theoretical modelling* was to stand back from the specific details of our cases, and to present the essence of our understanding and the key issues in ways which would be accessible to a wider audience. In this respect, we sought to fulfil the aspiration of ethnography to provide conceptual tools which might be helpful in reflecting on everyday practice. A series of models such as that in Figure 1 below, are intended to facilitate this (see also Pollard with Filer 1996, Pollard and Filer 1999, Filer and Pollard 2000)

For more detailed information of our research design and methods, see Pollard with Filer (1996, Chapter 10); Filer with Pollard (1998); Filer and Pollard 2000 and Filer (1993c, Chapter 11).

2.4 *The sociology of educational assessment*

In our focus on 'assessment' through the identity and Learning Programme, and in writing *The Social World of Pupil Assessment* we have sought to contribute to an emergent sociology of assessment. This relatively underdeveloped approach exists in a field that has been dominated by technical discourse of assessment and testing procedures, measurement and applications. More specifically, the present book can be located within the framework of Ann Filer's collection, *Assessment: Social Practice and Social Product* (2000), which identifies key 'themes' within a sociological discourse of educational assessment. Such a discourse presents insights into the fact that, as well as having educational purposes, assessment fulfils a range of political and social functions within modern societies.

3. A MODEL OF SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON ASSESSMENT

We present below a model of questions concerning social influences on assessment. The model represents our attempts, as described above, to stand back from the specific details of our cases and to present our understandings in an accessible way. The model presented here forms the basis of a model of greater sophistication which we present in *The Social World of Pupil Assessment* and which is also the organising device for that book. Incorporated into that more complex model are wider theoretical understandings relating to classroom assessment practices, to which we have space here only to make brief reference.

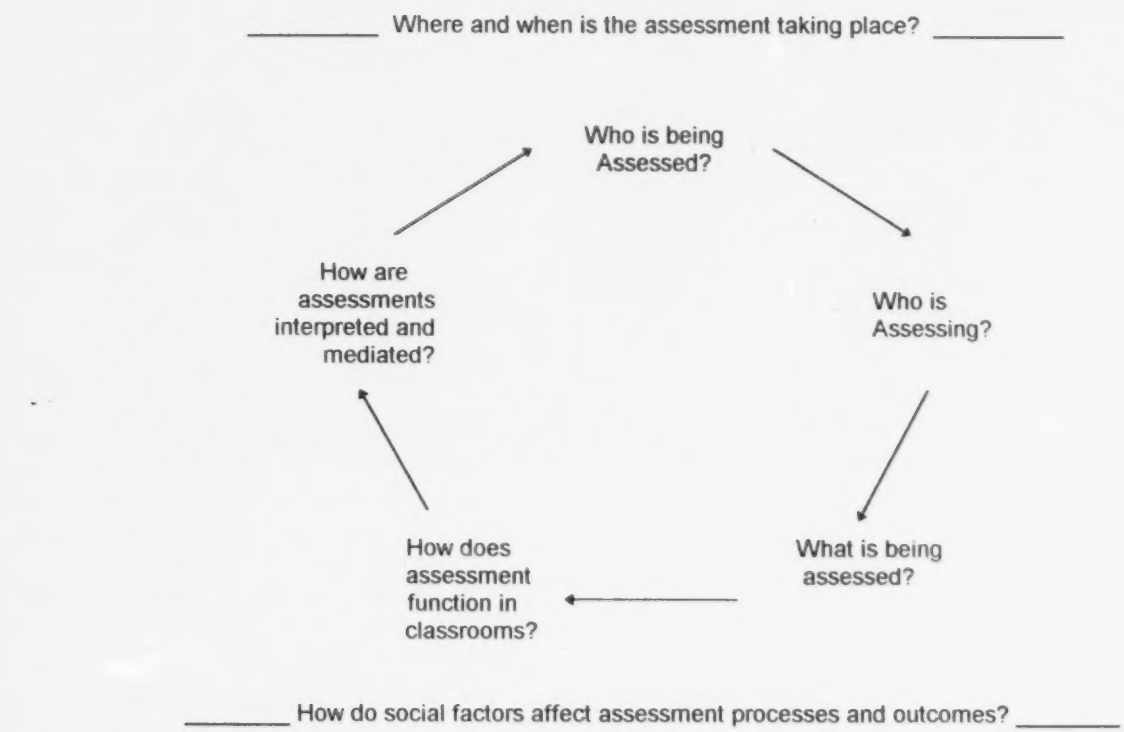
Where and when is the assessment taking place?
Who is being Assessed?
Who is Assessing?
What is being assessed?
How does assessment function in classrooms?
How are assessments interpreted and mediated?
How do social factors affect assessment processes and outcomes?

Figure 2 A model of questions concerning social influences on assessment

Below we outline some key issues relating to each of the questions on the above model. We then go on to present data relating to one child's primary school career in order to illustrate ways in which our model is grounded in the social and cultural contexts of children's home, peer group and successive classroom experiences.

3.1 *Where and when is the assessment taking place?*

The collection *'Assessment: Social Practice and Social Product'* (Filer 2000) concerns the 'socio- draws attention to the fact that assessment policies, requirements and prescriptions are culturally, structurally and politically embedded in particular societies at particular times. Thus whilst the *questions* raised through the above model are deemed to be relevant to an enquiry into the social influences on assessment in any setting or at any time, we locate the analytic implication of our responses to the questions within specific socio-cultural contexts of state policy, region and community. That is to say, we ask the question 'Where and when is the assessment taking place?'. In this case the contexts in question are those of two southern English primary schools in the early 1990s, serving what we would contrast as white, middle class and skilled working class families. Briefly here, for example, we can state that the childhood years of the children in the study were lived exclusively under Conservative governments promoting New Right arguments of nationalism, individual materialism and free market competition. Teachers were among the professional groups that successive governments of the 1980s and early 90s sought to challenge and primary school teachers, steeped in 'child centred commitments, were particularly vulnerable to new demands for accountability and reform. As indicated above, of particular relevance in the context of this study were the new national tests, league tables' of schools' results and requirements of 'evidence' on the part of teachers of pupils attainments under the new National Curriculum. Whilst, of course, we do not have the space here to provide full accounts of national and local policy contexts, and of the schools and communities they served, such accounts are presented in *'The Social World of Pupil Career'* and *The Social World of Pupil Assessment*..

3.2 *Who is being assessed?*

The question of 'Who is being assessed?' is central to our conception of the social world of pupil assessment. How do children come to see themselves as learners and as pupils? How do others see them as they strive to demonstrate competencies within the social context of their classroom? We suggested that this question raises the core issue of 'identity'.

Any theoretical discussion concerning the hugely complex topic of 'identity' is problematic and we can only here briefly outline the conclusions we have reached through the *Identity and Learning Programme* regarding 'What is 'identity'?'. Such conclusions are necessarily shaped by the particular theoretical and methodological perspectives we brought to the study and by the patterns of understandings we derived from the longitudinal tracking of children's learning and school careers.

From what we might term a broadly sociological perspective, any satisfactory account of identity has to synthesise the internal and personal concerns of individuals, and the external influences of cultures and expectations of appropriate social groups and the wider society. It can be argued therefore that, ultimately, we can only make sense of individuals in the context of their social relationships.

In exploring the question 'Who is learning?' and 'Who is being assessed?' through our publications, we focus on three groups of factors contributing to children's evolving identities as learners and as pupils. The factors were those of 'potential', 'resources' and 'relationships'.

Whilst recognising that 'potential', in the form of physical, intellectual and affective dispositions, is not fixed, year-on-year tracking of children's learning, interests and social relations in the contexts of home, playground and classroom, enabled some understandings of key strengths and potentialities of individuals. More importantly for our purposes though, longitudinal tracking of patterns of learning

and affective responses, enabled us to analyse aspects of classrooms contexts which varied in supporting those potentialities.

Through *'resources'*, we focus on the differential distribution of material, cultural and linguistic factors which give rise to socio-economic and cultural circumstances, and a differential flow of opportunities, experiences and cultural capital. Opportunities to deploy resources vary across settings and are influenced by attitudes toward social, linguistic or ethnic difference (see eg Tsoldis 1988). We can also question whether the values and expectations embodied in the assessed curriculum act to legitimise the lived experience of pupils or to exclude them (see eg Yates 1997:48).

The third aspect of 'identity' *'Relationships of self and others'* is a direct reference to symbolic interactionism and the development of self-awareness and the construction of meaning through interpersonal relationships. With regard to young children, this is undoubtedly an extremely significant level of social awareness. In our study for instance, the social identities of 'boy', 'girl' and 'pupil' took particular forms in respect of the English, middle class location of Greenside and that of the skilled working class location of Albert Park. Social identities were further modified by the positioning of the children in terms of attainment and participation in schools, and positioning in families and the community. As we argued (Pollard with Filer 1996, Pollard and Filer 1999, Filer and Pollard 2000), parents are key mediators of children's experience. They assist in interpreting and making sense of new challenges - and this includes understanding oneself as a 'pupil'.

However, our analysis of 'identity' above, leads us to raise questions concerning the nature of the holistic knowledge that teachers develop in relation to their pupils. Despite pressures to formalise their classroom assessment practices and the need to produce 'evidence', teacher use of 'whole child' approaches, for contextualising pupil progress and informing the next stage of teaching, have remained strong (Torrance and Pryor 1998, Pollard et al 1994, Broadfoot 1996). We have analysed pupils' identities as being continuously and *dynamically* shaped through the complexities of biography and experience, relationships and strategies for coping in successive classroom contexts. These contexts are in turn shaped by particular teacher biographies, expectations and strategies for coping. Further, many judgements that teachers make have been shown to arise, and be inseparable from, the particular classroom settings that they themselves create (Leiter 1974, Filer 1993c).

In the light of this interactive complexity we are therefore led to problematise what might be involved in a teacher 'knowing' a child. We have to question the assumptions are embedded in notions of a 'whole child' approach to learning and assessment, with its suggestion of a child as a knowable entity, accessible for teacher interpretation? Indeed, our longitudinal tracking of children's experience in home, playground, and classroom contexts, at Greenside and Albert Park School, has generated a wealth of data concerning the *different ways* in which teachers 'knew' the same children. Through our various publications we present detailed case studies of ways in which teachers presentation of educational knowledge and the social, emotional and organisational aspects of classroom life they create, can dramatically affect pupils' engagement with learning and classroom relationships. Hence, of course, they have a dramatic effect upon the assessments that flow from those engagements and relationships (Filer 1993c, Pollard with Filer 1996, Pollard and Filer 1999, Filer and Pollard 2000)

3.3 *Who is assessing?*

Having argued that pupil identity can only be understood in context, we clearly need to focus on teachers – since they are undoubtedly the most powerful classroom participants with whom pupils must interact. In particular, we need a sociological conception of pedagogy and its link to each teacher's own sense of personal identity. For this, we have deployed the concept of 'coping strategies' (Woods 1977, Hargreaves 1978, Pollard 1982) in attempting to analyse the relationship between macro socio-political analysis and micro-perspectives of individual teachers and school settings. Through our *ILP* publications we illustrate that process with research findings regarding the

personal and the contextually - specific ways in which teachers integrate national assessment requirements into their existing practices and manage the contradictions and constraints involved.

Similarly, through our publications we address our concerns with the 'child in context' in analysing the reciprocal strategies of pupils in coping with the day-to-day routines of classroom tasks. In particular, through the 'assessment' phase of the programme we analyses the differentiating affects of the 'meshing' of pupil and teacher coping strategies upon social and academic assessments relating to different groups of pupils. Thus we show the teacher's experience and interpretations of pupils' academic and social identities, not as neutral forms of diagnostic or formative assessments which attach to individual pupils, but as inseparable from the teacher-created context that gave rise to them (Filer 1993, Filer and Pollard 2000) .

3.4 *What is being assessed?*

An official answer to such a question might point to the subject content of a test, or to listed criteria of judgement, and would draw conclusions in terms of the 'attainment' of pupils. More colloquially, inferences about the particular 'abilities' of children may be legitimated by faith in the objectivity and categoric techniques of 'standardised assessment'. In *The Social World of Pupil Assessment* we argue that such confident conclusions are misplaced, because pupil knowledge, skills and understandings are embedded in particular socio-cultural understandings and conditioned by factors such as gender, ethnicity and social class. We particularly focus on the influence of peer culture and peer-group relationships and statuses and the ways in which these can condition performance and effectively influence the nature of individual pupils' engagements with tasks. Thus, whilst pupils' subject knowledge, skill or understanding may seem to be 'objectively' revealed by the neutral, standardisation technique of a test or by a classroom task or teacher questioning, tests and tasks also reveal the facilitation or constraint of socio-cultural influences and forms of understanding. Assessment, the analysis suggests, can never tap pure knowledge or capability – any result will also always reflect the wider socio-cultural circumstances of its production. Thus, beyond academic subject matter, we must ask 'what *else* is being assessed?'

3.5 *How does assessment function in classrooms?*

This question is concerned with the relationship between assessment and a range of other pedagogic function, and their differentiating impact on pupils assessed performances and outcomes. We can firstly contrast ways in which particular forms of assessment give rise to particular patterns of teacher-pupil relationships and interactions in the teaching process and different goals for learning.

For instance, research suggests that forms of assessment associated with closed questions, and tasks, tick lists and quantitative feedback function to promote 'shallow learning', with success in tests based on short term memorisation. However, forms of assessment in which the focus is on the learner's understanding rather than on the agenda of the assessor and are thus formative in relation to potential development, are deemed to be more likely to promote 'deep learning' (White 1992, Entwistle 1992, Torrance and Pryor 1998).

In addition to formal and explicit forms of assessment, a range of classroom evaluative practices are deemed to have significant effects on students learning, motivation and confidence. Evidence suggests that extrinsic rewards, competition and normative comparisons with peers all have a detrimental effect on intrinsic motivation (Lepper and Hoddell 1989). They appear to promote learning strategies related to 'performance goals' and the gaining of favourable judgments from others, rather than strategies related to 'learning goals' concerned with the gaining of competence and understanding (Dweck 1989, Nichols 1989, , Urdan and Maehr 1995). Such patterns associated with 'performance goals' can act to polarise pupil's attainment and promote learned helplessness in some. A narrow 'performance orientation', whilst satisfying short-term requirements for high-stakes assessment, may also have the unintended consequence of undermining long-term dispositions to learn through life (Broadfoot and Pollard 2000).

A range of evaluative practices are also used to communicate expectations for behaviour, and as a means of socialising children into school life and according to what are deemed to be appropriate gendered and racial norms and relationships (see eg. Torrance and Pryor 1998, Adams 1997, Filer and Pollard 2000).

Thus we assert that 'evidence' of attainment represents the outcome of a range of differentiating and polarising classroom processes and that it is not possible for pedagogic approaches to be 'neutral' in their impact on pupil performance or in their assessment of pupil performance. Irrespective of intentions, each teacher generates a *particular* set of circumstances in which interaction with each child takes place. The scope for variability in the overall effect is enormous.

3.6 *How are assessment interpreted and mediated?*

This question introduce the concept of the 'audience' of assessment, with particular reference to families and, to a lesser extent, peers. These are the 'significant others' whose influence we have traced throughout the *Identity and Learning Programme*, but their response to school assessments is particularly important. Most specifically, we consider how families interpret, mediate and give meaning to assessment outcomes, so that their impact on their child is shaped and filtered. Our studies show parents variously supporting, acting upon, contesting or ignoring the official and unofficial voices of school assessment. Once again then, we argue that the outcomes of assessment cannot be seen as categoric and direct in their consequence. Rather, their meaning is malleable and is likely to be drawn into existing frames of reference, relationships and patterns of social interaction. For each learner, this is an extremely important process in the development of further phases of their personal narrative and in the construction of identity.

Overall then, in relation to each of the five major questions set out in our cyclical model in Figure 2, we emphasise the influence of social factors on assessment. Learner and assessor, processes and interpretations are all embedded in their socio-cultural contexts and in webs of social relationships. In such circumstances, we believe that the technical 'objectivity' of assessment is a myth too far. Indeed, we go further, and argue that presently established practices yield patterns and systematic effects, which are fundamentally divisive. As the policy-makers configure the education system to meet the demands of international competition, they may also unwittingly reinforce social divisions and widen the life-chance gaps which children already face.

4. THE CASE OF HARRIET

In this section we illustrate the model in Figure 2 as it applies to individual cases of pupils learning, with a focus on one pupil, Harriet Morley. We can firstly consider those elements of identity concerned with *potential*, *resources* and *relationships* that invoke the question 'Who is being assessed?'.

4.1 *Who is being assessed?*

Identity: potential and resources

Harriet was the third child of Tom and Ruth Morley. The Morley's lived in a spacious detached house on the outskirts of Greenside, all sharing an active interest in the owning, stabling and riding of horses as an important focus of family and social life.

Though the youngest, by some years, Harriet was powerful and effective in influencing the family in her own interests. Though some early reading activities took place at playgroup, there was little formal attempt to teach Harriet the skills of reading and writing in the home before she went to school. However, Harriet was very skilful in instructing her grandmother on how to write stories for her to copy and, with two older siblings, and parents as well as Gran to cajole into extra story reading.

she was actively taking control of her learning from a very early age. These issues of control and self determination in learning were to emerge as important features in Harriet's learning relationships through her primary school years.

However, it was not simply a matter of Harriet's determination that she was able to push through her own agenda. This was also in many instances due to the spirit of compromise within the family:

Mrs Morley — Harriet is the noisiest and bossiest.

Mr Morley — Emma has always to an extent given way for Harriet, hasn't she? Emma has been playing with something and Harriet has wanted it. Emma has been the one to give up the pen or ...

Mrs Morley — Because it makes life easier for me as well. It isn't just that Emma is being weak. I wouldn't really in many circumstances want them to fight it out. I would rather that she did give way.

Mr Morley — Certainly when Harriet screams.

Mrs Morley — I hate them all crying and quarrelling over things. I know that families do do that, but she is getting quite clever at trying, maybe let Harriet have it for a short while and then ... not have a head on confrontation with her.

(Parent interview, March 1988, Reception)

(Parent interview, March 1988, Reception)

Harriet's parents also in part attributed their more relaxed response to Harriet to the fact that as a baby she had a heart murmur and early feelings that 'we had to look after her a bit more'. However, Harriet had quickly grown into a strong, well co-ordinated and energetic girl. Her parents reported that she could kick a ball very well, virtually from the time she could walk and by the time she went to school, could 'really whack a ball with a hockey stick'.

Whilst Mrs Morley accepted, and to a degree encouraged Harriet's self direction in her learning at home, her expectations for institutional learning were different. She was concerned that a lack of emphasis upon formal learning of basic skills prevailed in primary education generally. Mrs Morley felt less than certain that Harriet's future education would be as structured and as satisfactory as she would wish.

The above offers a brief impression of some of Harriet's 'potential' and 'resources' with which she embarked on school life. We have also begun to consider our third factor in 'identity', that of 'relationships' within the family. The following section invites a consideration of Harriet's important relationships with teachers and peers as she began school.

Identity: relationships between self and others

Harriet's transition to school at four years and three months was smooth and her Reception class teacher, Mrs Powell, found her to be full of 'bouncy self confidence'.

Mrs Powell — She is quite bright and quite confident really. She always seems to have boundless energy actually. I think she is basically a jolly sort of person. Nothing too much really gets to her.

(Teacher interview, February 1988, Reception)

Harriet's closest friend during those early school days was Daniel, whom she had known since they were babies. Amongst her peers, Harriet interacted in ways that bore a resemblance to her relationships with her siblings:

> Very vociferous. Wherever she is, she is shouting about it. She enjoys the construction activities more than most of the girls ... and the home corner she is very happy in. She is probably a little bit bossy.
>
> (Mrs Powell, teacher interview, February 1988, Reception)

This description also bore a resemblance to Mrs Morley's observation that Harriet's interests were less traditionally gendered than many of her peers. Whilst Harriet loved her dolls, she also liked climbing trees, chasing around and playing with Mobilo.

As the school year drew to an end Mrs Morley thought that Harriet was not quite as happy as when she had started. Under pressure from other boys, Daniel had withdrawn from associating with Harriet as a girl and she had not yet made any special friends among other girls. Although Mrs Morley was keen for this to happen, she also had a fairly ambivalent view of the 'rule' oriented 'good girl' culture of some girls' groups at Greenside:

> I hate all this business. 'You're not allowed to do that'....if anything I rather like to break the rules. I think she should do what she thinks is right.
>
> (Parent interview, July 1988, Reception)

However, Harriet's teacher continued to regard her as a happy and sociable girl who co-operated well with her peers and well able to cope with the pressures of the peer group.

In addition Mrs Powell was pleased with Harriet's attainment and progress across the curriculum. She reported among other things, that:

> Harriet always has ideas for writing. Her handwriting is much improved.
>
> Harriet enjoys all creative activities.
>
> Harriet reads very well with good expression and understanding, with obvious enjoyment.
>
> Harriet enjoys practical mathematics and number work and has made good progress.
>
> (Mrs Powell, extracts from report to parents, Summer term 1988, Reception)

However, Harriet's mother was somewhat less than satisfied and she certainly had a different perception of Harriet's literacy skills at the end of her first year of schooling than Mrs Powell. Perhaps the most startling observation was that she considered Harriet's writing to be 'nearly up to the standard' of the year before:

> It seems to me that she has done so little during the year that it has almost gone back to nothing.
>
> (Parent interview, June 1988, Reception)

Mrs Morley's lack of confidence in the school was compounded that summer by a series of incidents which she felt were unprofessionally handled by staff at the school. One such incident concerned the Year 1 teachers criticisms of Mrs Morley's approach to supporting Harriet's reading, characterised as 'pushing' her. A further incident concerned an oversight of supervision whereby Harriet walked home unaccompanied crossing parklands and busy main roads. Such incidents provoked some bitter clashes between Mrs Morley and staff at Greenside School.

However, these disappointments and unhappy clashes seemed to have left Harriet unscathed, and it seemed to be the case that, as Mrs Powell suggested, 'nothing much gets to her'. She accepted the discipline of school and did what was required, though ultimately indifferent to either pleasing or displeasing Mrs Powell.

In contrast with her Reception year, Harriet's experience through Year 1 was marked by a poor pupil-teacher relationship and some loss of social confidence. Indeed, existing abrasive and antipathetic relationship between Miss Scott and Mrs Morley spilled over into the teacher's perceptions of Harriet and her professional dealings with her

> I am afraid there is a slight problem in that I know Mrs Morley, we know each other from old. Harriet - I didn't from the instant ... Okay, you can't blame the child for the mother ... but Harriet was so rude in her way that she speaks to you in that she would be very abrupt and surly .... I suppose I am on the defensive in many respects .... but also partly because her mother does come in and she would take over Harriet's education if she possibly could, or definitely her reading which she thinks is obviously the `be all and end all'
> (Teacher interview, November 1988, Year 1)

Harriet, for her part, withdrawing the happy compliance that she had shown in Mrs Powell's class. Miss Scott in her records and in interview described Harriet variously as having `a difficult attitude', `stubborn', `not relaxed', `quiet', `sullen', `rude'.

Miss Scott also found a greater discrepancy between Harriet's skills across different areas of the curriculum than did Mrs Powell and there was a qualitative difference between the two teachers' assessments of her progress and application to tasks. Thus, for example, whereas Mrs Powell was pleased with Harriet's writing and maths progress and attainment, Miss Scott recorded:

> Harriet finds writing difficult thus the skill is immature and still does not match her reading. Similarly her maths.
>
> (Miss Scott, teacher records, January 1989, Year 1)

With regard to maths, Miss Scott regarded Harriet as `vastly behind', and indeed, her progress slowed in both maths and writing that year.

However, during what was in many ways not a very successful or happy year at school, Harriet was rapidly developing a range of skills and confidence - but in an altogether different context.

> Mrs Morley — Well, she started riding just over a year ago now, but she's got plenty of confidence on that and there's never any hesitation about approaching the horses or trying new things ... and she gets on with the people there. We've just been to this place, a farm near Symington Bay, and she gets on ever so well there - Harriet bossing people about, telling fathers who are leading their children that they are doing it the wrong way, and she's right in what she says. But I don't think that confidence comes over particularly in (the school situation).
>
> (Parent interview, July 1989, Year 1)

In this section we have considered 'Who is being assessed?' and issues relating to Harriet's identity through her early years of schooling. We have, at the same time, begun to problematize what is involved for a teacher in 'knowing a child' for assessment purposes. Harriet's first two teachers 'knew' her in very different ways. They experienced and interpreted her social and academic identity in different ways, and in ways that in key respects differed from those experienced and interpreted by her parents.

From a comparison of two teachers perceptions of her identity and experience of her engagement and motivation in classroom tasks, issues concerned with 'Who is assessing?' came to the fore.

4.2 *Who was assessing Harriet?*

Briefly here, we can consider some further differences among Harriet's successive teachers with regard to their experiences and perceptions, as she responded to the curricular, organisational and social contexts that they created.

Through successive years at Greenside School, Harriet showed an enthusiastic approach to learning where rapport with teachers was established and where a route to establishing and expressing her distinct identity through classroom tasks existed. Where these did not exist, she was likely to become demotivated and dispirited, privately holding a degree of mild contempt for the expectations and interests of both teachers and her more competitive peers.

In Year 2 her teacher, Miss George, offered strong support for the development of her positive self image as a pupil. The organisation of learning and the planning of tasks in Miss George's class enabled children to have a greater control over the content of tasks. Harriet used this greater autonomy to begin to carve out an identity and a classroom status that was distinct from that of most of her peers through her writing, talking and artwork. Here we see Miss George both acknowledging and allowing Harriet to give expression to an area of special interest in which her competence and self esteem were high

> She's a really good reader. Anything she writes is horses. That's all she talks about. ... (and) reading books out of the library. I was going through the pink tickets ... and if it was a horsy type book they'd say `That's Harriet'. She's good at writing stories because they will be pages long ... But she' s quite happy to spend a few days doing it and then going through it. She knows exactly what she's written.
>
> (Miss George, teacher interview, November 1989)

Thus Harriet's writing was prolific that year and, just as she did at home, she displayed an intrinsic satisfaction in taking control of particular learning goals in the development of her literacy skills. However, the expression of her interests in this way depended on the level of freedom which Miss George permitted pupils to negotiate the content and time permitted to particular classroom activities.

In Year 3 the curriculum was organised in ways that allowed little individuality or spontaneous creativity and more formally structured expressions of knowledge crowded out the opportunities for freedom of expression. No distinct expression of Harriet's identity surfaced in that year, nor were her out of school interests celebrated or supported in that classroom. This contrasted with other more mainstream and curriculum related interests such as computers, sports, football, gymnastics and dance that found expression in other pupils' school identities.

Mr Brown, her Year 3 teacher felt she was not achieving all she might and that her progression lagged behind her capabilities. The enthusiastic and prolific response that she brought to writing tasks in Year 2, and again in later years, was not evident in Year 3.

Tracking Harriet through Years 4 and 5, her experience was characterised by rapport with her teachers and support for her classroom identity and status. Harriet's academic and social qualities were appreciated by those teachers. Harriet responded to them with enthusiasm, showing continued progression not only in her preferred writing tasks, but also across other areas of the curriculum where she had formerly shown reluctance. General classroom confidence and status rose and she widened her relationships with girls other than her special friends.

Initially seen by her Year 6 teacher as 'bubbly' and self confident, through her last year at Greenside School, Harriet increasingly lapsed into indifference and withdrawal. She seemed to dissociate from whatever success she did have as well as from teacher evaluations and praise.

> I can give you an example. Yesterday she did a piece of work that I thought had the most superb description in it and Harriet said 'It's just boring. Its boring'. She is somewhat

withdrawn from what is going on with the rest of us, so that she doesn't appear to be within the class
(Mrs Chard, teacher interview June 1994, Year 6)

Perhaps because Mrs Chard had no experience of Harriet as a committed and enthusiastic participant of classroom life, she did not appreciate Harriet's unhappiness that year, or that her withdrawal was a symptom of it. As in Year 3, Harriet seemed to have no outlet for expression of her identity in that year. As we have seen, where she could incorporate her out-of-school interests in horses and other animals and her imaginative identity into curriculum tasks she enjoyed school. In those contexts she liked her teachers and, importantly, felt liked and valued by them. In such classrooms her teachers viewed her as 'intelligent', 'creative' and 'co-operative'. In contexts where she could not achieve rapport, identity and status in this way (Years 1, 3 and 6) she was seen as underachieving and variously 'stubborn', 'lacking enthusiasm' and viewed with incomprehension, even hostility.

Viewing Harriet's career longitudinally therefore, we see considerable variability in the ways in which she was viewed as a learner. Different teacher expectations, perceptions and different structural contexts brought about more, or less, positive academic learning outcomes. In parallel, and not surprisingly, they also brought about more, or less positive outcomes with regard to pupil relationships with teachers.

Harriet's data, like that of other case stories, problematises what is involved in a teacher 'knowing' a child. In posing the question of 'Who is assessing?' however, we also begin to be concerned with *teachers* as individuals. There is not the space here to further explore the professional and biographical experiences which shape teachers' practices, and the assessment contexts they create. However, this topic is explored fully in *The Social World of Pupil Assessment* (Chapters 5 and 6).

4.3 *What is being assessed?*

In answering the question 'What is being assessed? we consider ways in which Harriet's responses to classroom tasks were embedded in a wider field of action and relationships than those framed by teacher expectations.

In *'The Social World of Pupil Career'* we showed how children were constantly active in shaping and maintaining their identities as pupils. We see through the biographical narratives how their sense of themselves as pupils is continuously being shaped at the dynamic intersection of important relationships, of socio-cultural expectations of their homes, of other Greenside families and children and of the school.

At this point is useful to consider the sense of self which Harriet brought to those classroom contexts. As described above, for Harriet, an early disposition towards autonomy and self-direction was powerful in asserting her will and gaining support for her learning in her family. In some years she was able to give expression to this aspect of her identity in school. In much the same way as described above in relation to Year 2, she was allowed some control over the content and pacing of her learning which helped to develop a self-confident assertion of her own distinct identity, supported her learning and rapport with her teachers. In other years she was unable to draw in that same identity and seemed to have no sense of identification or belonging in classrooms. Harriet's responses to tasks took place in a school culture that more obviously and readily reflected and supported the expression of the more dominant culture among girls from Greenside families.

However, by Year 5, Harriet and her close friend Hazel were confidently distancing themselves from a gender stereotype of identification with body and style consciousness which the majority of girls were giving expression to

Hazel ..... We're a rather funny group.

Harriet The rest of the groups are pratts. Snobs.

AF How are some (children) snobs?

Harriet They say `I'm better than you' (...) Showing off. Their hair, their body. Like this [Harriet flicks her hair]. Sally Gordon always tries to make her hair curly and nice for all the boys in school.

(.....)

Harriet [Harriet shows me (Ann Filer) how Sally walks to `show off' her body].

Hazel And they like to make themselves all tidy with shiny shoes and little squeaky voices.

AF So your group is different.

Harriet Yes. We're normal.

Hazel No, we're not normal. Some people say we're crazy. They bring in Barbie books and dolls and trolls.

Harriet And silly little pencils with trolls on and Barbie pencil cases.

AF So you don't go in for that sort of thing.

Hazel No. I just use any pencil that works.

(Friendship group interview, January 1993, Year 5)

In interviews at this time, Harriet was also articulating her rejection of the competitive and teacher-pleasing approach of the dominant girls' groups in the class. Thus Harriet's classroom responses and engagements were very much embedded in her distinct sense of self as physically and culturally distinct in her identity.

As we have described, the ebb and flow of engagements and relationships with teachers had a profound affect upon Harriet's learning, and the assessment of that learning. Thus we can, with some justification, ask: 'What else was being assessed?' when she could be judged by her teachers alternatively as 'intelligent', 'creative' and co-operative', or, 'underachieving', 'lacking enthusiasm', 'lacking involvement and commitment'.

4.4 *How were assessments of Harriet interpreted and mediated?*

In addressing this question, we can, for instance, consider the evaluations made by parents of assessments of their child in decisions to support, ignore, contest, or offer alternative interpretations to their child.

Like many parents, Mrs Morley was prepared to bring some judicious scepticism to the pronouncements made on her child's character and attainment. Like others, she was aware that some teachers were likely to 'get the best out of her' where others were less successful. As already described, Harriet's mother regretted what she saw as the lack of emphasis upon formal learning and basic skills in primary schools generally. This necessarily shaped her responses to school assessments. Something of the dynamics of Ruth Morley's strategic responses to assessment through her daughters primary school career is set out below. We have described above how Mrs Morley's early attempts to influence teachers' expectations and outcomes for her daughter were interpreted by teachers at Greenside as somewhat 'deviant'. From those early antagonistic relations with school, Mrs Morley began a gradual withdrawal from involvement in her daughter's schooling which culminated by Year 6 in an almost complete separation of home and school concerns and experience for Harriet and her mother.

AP Tell me a little bit more about how you see her self confidence with maths

Mrs Morley Well really, not being in the classroom, I can't say, and I always find it very difficult to find out exactly what is going on because if you ask too many questions you're labelled anxious. So I can't tell you.
(.....)
At one time I was helping her to chose the (reading) books but that went out of my control completely. And I didn't find the books very good that she was bringing home. It makes it sound as if I am very pushy and anxious but in the end I thought, I can't. I won't do anything at all. Just let it slip.

AP So really, your policy over the year was to 'keep your head down', in a sense?

Mrs Morley Yes. I mean, I wish that teachers would appreciate parents who are anxious to find out what their children do. Why don't they? Tell me.
(Parent interview, July 1989, Year 1)

Thus over time, Mrs Morley began to adopt a greater measure of indifference to school agenda and assessments. For instance, Mrs Morley was not confident that Harriet was doing as well in maths as teachers reported. She explained:

> Well, you know, they always write really nice reports but I imagine they probably do for most people and I honestly don't think Harriet's got much of a clue in her maths and yet they all say she's got a good grasp. But delve below the surface and she knows very little.
> (Mrs Morley, parent interview, July 1993, Year 5)

Although concerned in particular about Harriet's maths, Mrs Morley increasingly expressed a more philosophical perspective on Harriet's education. She found that their busy family life did not leave a lot of time for over-close supervision of learning and had come to the conclusion that, compared with many families in the neighbourhood, they were probably not `pushy' enough to see high academic success coming from their children.

In *The Social World of Pupil Assessment*, we elaborate in more detail the multi-dimensional and dynamic processes which also characterise teachers' and peers' involvements in the interpretation and mediation of classroom assessment. In the following section however, we see how some of this dynamic worked out in relation to outcomes for Harriet.

4.5 *How did assessment function in Harriet's life?*

As we have described above, Harriet was relatively indifferent to teacher urgings and extrinsic reward systems and public measurements of achievement against peers did little to motivate her. Indeed, we have seen something of her efforts to establish a classroom identity and status that was, in important respects, independent of teacher and peer group norms and expectations.

Nevertheless, it was important for Harriet to be liked and valued by teachers, but for her own distinctive qualities and contributions, rather than through adapting and pleasing through being 'first' or 'best' in what were often highly competitive classroom environments. Even in one of her most successful and high achieving years, Year 5, her success was not motivated by the extrinsic rewards of better marks or favourable comparisons with peers' achievements. Year 5, was a year in which Harriet's classroom confidence and enthusiasm were established in the context of a teacher relationship in which she felt valued, and in which public recognition was given to her personal qualities, as well as any academic qualities she showed. It was a year that Harriet had declared 'brilliant', in which 'I liked my teacher and she liked me'. Her Year 5 teacher, Miss French talked about Harriet's working relationships in the classroom that year:

> Harriet mixes well with others. She can be a bit of a dreamer but she tends to work well most of the time on task .... not very competitive. I think she takes a pride in her own work, she's not behind by any means. She's not competing to be first in the class, she just likes to keep pace and she's doing that quite easily. I wouldn't say she's a natural leader, although she makes her fair share of contributions, she doesn't try to dominate. But I wouldn't say she was easily lead either.
>
> (Miss French, teacher interview, July 1993, Year 5)

As we have indicated above, Harriet at this point in her career, was expressing a gender identity that was distinct from the mainstream girls' groups. An aspect of that identity was that she took care to distance herself from the competitive and teacher-pleasing approach to achievement of some girls' groups in the class.

> AF Can you tell me how you think some children get to do well in school?
>
> Harriet By being teacher's pet. Someone like Sally Gordon. Gets everything right.
>
> AF Do the friends that children have make a difference to how well they do in school?
>
> Harriet Well Mary and Sally, they are two people who really suck up to each other but if Mary gets ahead Sally will rush to finish to get with her. Sally might say `Well it wasn't me that did that picture' if it wasn't good, `it was Mary', because she doesn't want to get told off.
>
> (Pupil interview, June 1993, Year 5)

We see with respect to some of Harriet's peers here, evidence of the cultivation of extrinsic motivations towards 'performance goals' and competitive rivalries for favourable judgements. Case studies of such pupils, and the sources of their motivation in family, peer group and classroom cultural contexts are explored elsewhere (Pollard with Filer 1996, Pollard and Filer 1999). However, through a study of Harriet's data, we also see something of the potential for teachers to foster alternative learning styles and pupil identities. As outlined in Section 3.5, formal and informal classroom evaluative practices can function to foster 'learning goals' rather than 'performance goals, intrinsic rather than extrinsic satisfaction and motivation, and confidence in learning.

CONCLUSION

In one sense this research project can be seen as contributing to the now well-established tradition of school ethnographies. We particularly hope that it will complement other work and at least break some new ground through its explicit focus on pupils and through its sociological treatment of learning assessment and pupil career. Indeed, at the core of the *ILP* publications are rich, case-study stories of the children's development and experiences which, we think, are both fascinating and provocative.

In addition however, we hope that discussion of the research will contribute to a reappraisal of the way educational provision is viewed in the late 1990s. Through highlighting the importance of social factors in learning and schooling we hope that the study will act as a counter to the crude emphasis on assessment for accountability, management and the innumerable populist prescriptions for change which has characterised educational developments since the 1988 Education Reform Act.

This study and others (eg Torrance and Pryor, 1998) suggest that technical approaches need to be supplemented with sociological understandings if assessment practices are to be used effectively in the support of learning. These understandings, at first sight, may appear to place the outcomes of assessment practices, reporting and mediation within the realms of an unknowable complexity of human relations and expectation. However, Broadfoot (1996), with this sort complexity in mind,

wonders whether, in place of the prevailing view of assessment as a science, we should view it as an art. From this perspective, the patterns of relations and expectations and the dynamics of teacher, peer and family influences such as are suggested by these case studies and models suggest the way forward for a more reflexive and flexible approach for teachers in developing their role as assessors and mediators in promoting learning.

At a time when UK primary schools have been moving towards more formalised approaches to assessment, dissatisfaction has been growing with traditional approaches to assessment in secondary schools and higher education. The limited scope and the limiting affects on teaching and learning, together with international economic and employment trends have, in recent years, heralded interest in new forms of assessment. We have thus seen the development and gradual introduction of more competency based, formative, and collaborative forms of assessment, with modular and course work forms of assessment replacing the 'sudden death' of the formal examination. The understandings and perspectives of students, and student's agendas, are increasingly likely to inform the next stage of learning alongside curriculum and teacher agendas (Broadfoot, 1996). From a sociological perspective, however, our understanding of the role of assessment in student experience and learning is limited. Studies of the socio-cultural contexts which help shape pupils' assessment goals and responses therefore, not only offer a deeper understanding of what we do now. They are also crucial for the effective implementation of the more holistic, collaborative and reflexive approaches to assessment and to learning that the future offers.

Through the *Identity and Learning* Programme, we seek greater understanding of the importance of family contexts and parental perspectives as just such a basis for a more holistic, collaborative and reflexive approach to learning and assessment. Assessment policy in England has, for some years, been based on misconceptions of 'what parents want'. There is plenty of evidence that parents are more sophisticated in their understanding of what is important in education, and potentially more willing *partners in learning* than their positioning as 'consumers' allows. Unfortunately, whilst government policy remains driven by the ideology and discourse of performance (Broadfoot and Pollard 2000), then teachers are likely to remain within its yoke, and parents will remain as clients.

As we have tried to indicate, with reference to one child's case study data, parents may be more able than teachers to sense emotional issues in learning, to notice changes in attitudes over time, and to monitor motivation, interest and commitment in different subjects or areas of skill development. Personal interest, individual attention, deep knowledge and sensitivity are all on the parent's side as a teacher of their child. But this potential must also be harnessed into an active, collaborative partnership between parents and their children and teachers. In this, mutual understanding of motivations, perceptions and the strategic and dynamic nature of home school relationships is a precondition. The analysis offered in this chapter is a contribution to this goal.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the support of the University of the West of England, the University of Bristol and the Economic and Social Research Council for the research project which is reported in this paper.

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